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The Genius Loci of Chinese Manuscripts

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"THE GENIUS LOCI OF CHINESE MANUSCRIPTS"

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MANUSCRIPT COPIES OF STONE INSCRIPTIONS IN THE DUNHUANG CORPUS: ISSUES OF DATING AND PROVENANCE

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Abstract

Modern observers tend to simplify the complex process of textual transmission and imagine that in a manuscript culture texts were handed down by scribes copying manuscripts in a long line of succession extending for generations. It is less commonly recognized, however, that manuscript copies were also routinely made from non-handwritten material, such as printed works or stone inscriptions. This paper looks at dated copies of stele inscriptions among the Dunhuang manuscripts, in an attempt to demonstrate the inherent difficulties in dating and establishing provenance for such copies. One of the main questions is whether the date in the colophon refers to the time when the text was carved into stone or the moment of creating the manuscript copy. The analysis reveals that there is no automatic answer to this problem, and the decision has to be made on a case-by-case basis. An additional lesson is that in many cases manuscripts are composite objects the components of which had a history of their own. The panels comprising a typical scroll often came from different locations and were written decades or more apart. It is through analyzing the interrelation of the texts and panels that we begin to uncover the complex process of the manuscript's creation and the different layers of time and locations.

1. Introductory Remarks on the Rôle of Date and Provenance

The Dunhuang manuscripts testify to the existence of a rich scribal tradition by the Sui-Tang period.[1] Looking over broad sweeps of history, the modern observer tends to simplify the complex process of textual transmission and imagine that in a manuscript culture texts were handed down by scribes copying them from older to newer manuscripts in a long line of succession extending for generations. It is less commonly recognized, however, that manuscript copies were also routinely made from non-handwritten material, such as printed works or

1 This is not to say, of course, that China did not have well-developed manuscript traditions in earlier time periods (e.g. the Warring States period) but those traditions were to a large extent disconnected from medieval scribal culture.

stone inscriptions. Thus there was a significant amount of "horizontal" interaction between texts appearing on different media, which for modern researchers further complicates the issues of dating and provenance.

In this paper I am interested in dated copies of inscriptions within the Dunhuang Chinese corpus. Generally speaking, such texts would have 1) a primary date when they had been carved into stone; and 2) a secondary date when the manuscript copy in question was created. Generally speaking, there may have also been a number of stages in between these two extreme points, as the text of an inscription could have easily been copied from another copy. My intention is to try to uncover these layers, and to see how much information about the time and place of the manuscript's production can be reconstructed. An intriguing question in this respect is our ability to determine whether the colophon, if such exists, records the primary or secondary date.[2]

The other significant issue is provenance. Since many of the manuscripts found at Dunhuang had been produced hundreds or even thousands of miles away, the identification of their place of origin is a serious challenge to researchers. At the same time, we would expect that a copy of a stele inscription was generally produced *in situ*, and therefore the stele's location would determine the provenance of the manuscript. But if we think through the possible combinations during the process of copying, we realize that the issue of provenance is unavoidably more complicated than that of dating. The basic scenario is that a monk copied an inscription sitting in front of it. But would the provenance change if he took a rubbing and carried it with him further on his pilgrimage, and made a copy there?[3] Or if he himself was from Kaifeng, merely passing through Dunhuang on a pilgrimage to India; would we then identify the provenance of the manuscript with place A where the original inscription stands; or with place B where he actually made a copy from a rubbing or another copy; or with place C where he himself belonged in terms of his training? After all, from

2 An interesting case of having both dates side by side is manuscript Or.8210/S.3475, which has two colophons, each with a date that are at least four years apart. According to GILES (1934:560–561) both of these, and the main text, were written by the same hand, and the solution to the puzzle was that the earlier colophon was copied together with the whole text. Therefore, this colophon could not represent the date, or provenance, of the act of copying as it itself was part of the copied material.

3 There were also three early rubbings discovered at Dunhuang, one of them from the 6th century representing the earliest known example of this technique. This rare piece is the *Wenquanming* 溫泉銘 by the Tang Emperor Taizong 太宗, now housed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the point of view of the palaeographic features of the manuscript, the monk's own training and background would be the most significant. If he was from a monastery of Kaifeng then his copy, even if he produced it in Dunhuang, would reflect the writing habits of Central China. So we would perhaps be more correct in identifying this particular manuscript as a Kaifeng manuscript, even though it was produced in Dunhuang on local paper. Now if the monk added a colophon saying that he made this copy on such and such a date in Dunhuang, we would normally not hesitate to ascribe the provenance of the document to Dunhuang, even if it reflected the scribal traditions of Kaifeng.

By definition, stone inscriptions are tied to a specific location. Although there are well-known examples in history when stone tablets had been moved from one place to another, the majority of them remain where they were erected.[4] In fact, to a certain degree their immovability and stability determines their function of handing down a message for posterity. Stele inscriptions form an important part of the traditional Chinese topography, they epitomize the history of the place in a textual format and with time become part of the landscape. Their fame may draw visitors from great distances; a well-known stele can be more appealing to traveller-scholars than the natural scenery surrounding it.[5] While the heavy stone slabs are bound to a definite location, visitors create rubbings, tracings, or handwritten copies of the inscriptions, which are carried to distant regions. But no matter how far they go, they would always be viewed in reference to their master copy and the place where it stands. Thus not only the steles themselves but also their sometimes quite numerous copies possess a strong connection with the *genius loci* of the original place.

Inscriptions usually include a date. The majority of the manuscripts, on the other hand, are undated and can only be assigned to a general time period on the basis of their codicological characteristics, such as the type of paper, calligraphy, etc.[6] Dated colophons, provided that they are authentic, are the primary means by which we identify the date and provenance of manuscripts. Naturally, this is based on the assumption that the colophon was appended to the main text at the

4 A famous example of a relocation of steles is the evacuation and subsequent transfers of the Kaicheng Stone Steles (Kaicheng shijing bei 開成石經碑) in the 10th century, as well as the gradual accumulation of the Stele Forest (Beilin 碑林) in Xi'an.

5 On such type of antiquarian tourism (*fanggu* 訪古) and its function as archaeological field work, see RUDOLPH, 1963.

6 FUJIEDA (1969:17) estimates that there are about 1000 dateable manuscripts in the Dunhuang corpus. This is in contrast with the total number of 50,000 items in collections throughout the world.

time when the latter was written or copied. In putting our faith in this assumption, however, we tend to forget that manuscripts are not abstract texts with a precise time of origin but composite objects where the many components may have different dates. Thus a copy of an existing text could have been written on an older paper, perhaps even with an older ink. The colophon, in turn, could have been applied at another time; or another text could have been added to the verso side during a different dynasty. Then, the manuscript could have been in continuous use in the course of which new marks and comments may have been added on the margins or between the lines. In this way, the question of the concrete date of a particular manuscript at times may be complicated, and many of the Dunhuang manuscripts testify that such complex cases have indeed occurred in real life.

The recording of epigraphic material has a long tradition in China. Not only local gazetteers but most travel accounts include transcriptions of the stele inscriptions found in a particular location. The *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527) recorded the text of many stele inscriptions, most of which did not survive. The famous Song epigrapher Hong Kuo 洪适 (1117–1184) also quoted many of these in his *Lishi* 隸釋. Generally speaking, the inscriptions were considered part of the landscape and were carefully enumerated in topographical descriptions.

Within the Dunhuang corpus there are quite a few manuscripts with such copies and, since in some cases the original inscriptions have not survived, they provide valuable source material for studying the history of the caves. Among the best known examples of such material are three "Li" (Li shi 李氏) steles customarily referred to according to the reign periods during which they were erected: 1) the Shengli stele (Shengli bei 聖歷碑); 2) the Dali stele (Dali bei 大歷碑); and 3) the Qianning stele (Qianning bei 乾寧碑).[7] The Shengli stele dates to the 1st year of the Shengli reign (698) and records the merits of Li Kerang 李克讓 in creating a cave. It is currently located in the Museum of the Dunhuang Academy at Mogao, with a copy on manuscript P.2551 in the Pelliot collection. The Dali stele dates to the 11th year of the Dali reign (776) and commemorates the carving of Cave 148 by Li Dabing 李大兵. The original of the stele is still standing in the antechamber of Cave 148, but copies are found on manuscripts P.3608, P.4640 (Pelliot collection), and Or.8210/S.6203 (Stein collection). The Qianning stele dates to the 1st year of the Qianning reign (894) and records the renovation of Cave 148 by Li Mingzhen 李明振. This inscription is on the

7 On these three inscriptions, see XIE, 2000.

backside of the Dali stele, which stands in Cave 148, while a manuscript copy can be found on P.4640 in the Pelliot collection.

But apart from these three examples there are quite a few other copies of inscriptions among the Dunhuang manuscripts. In some cases the original inscriptions are no longer extant and only their manuscript copies have survived. As a case study, I would like to examine here two dated manuscripts which can be positively ascertained to have been copied from stone inscriptions. The first one is a text recording the earliest history of the Mogao Caves with the original still present on the wall of one of the caves. The second inscription, however, written as a commemoration of rebuilding the Gantong monastery (Gantong si 感通寺) at Liangzhou 涼州, has been lost and the only copy of it survives in the form of a manuscript found at Dunhuang. Thus in this second case the issue of provenance is of particular interest.

2. Record of the Mogao Caves

The text called *Mogao ku ji* 莫高窟記 (Record of the Mogao Caves) is found on manuscript P.3720 in the Pelliot collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[8] The recto of this manuscript contains an assortment of texts related to the monk Wuzhen 悟真, including the decrees of his appointments to office (oddly one in duplicate) at dates ranging from 851 to 869.[9] These are followed by several poems and eulogies, one of which is dated 934, and finally an incomplete text called *Zhang Huaishen zao ku ji* 張淮深造窟記, commemorating the building of a cave by Zhang Huaishen (867–890).[10] The verso of the manuscript is mostly blank, with only a few lines of text beside the *Mogao ku ji*, positioned upside down. The original inscription was carved directly onto the surface of the northern wall of the antechamber of Cave 156.[11] Unfortunately, the

8 Paul Pelliot discovered this manuscript on March 18, 1908, while examining the contents of the Library Cave at Mogao. See PELLIOT, 2008:287.

9 For a more detailed description of the texts on this manuscripts, see SOYMIÉ, 1991:209–212.

10 The same text is also often referred to as *Zhang Huaishen zao ku gongde ji* 張淮深造窟功德記. Zhang Huaishen was the nephew of Zhang Yichao 張議潮 (799–872), the ruler of Dunhuang during this period. It is believed that Cave 156 was dedicated by Zhang Huaishen in memory of his uncle.

11 Cave 156 was created in commemoration of Zhang Yichao's victory over the Tibetans. Rong Xinjiang estimated that the cave was carved in 861 and eventually finished by Zhang

inscription is so faint today that one can only rely on traced copies to read it. The most striking feature of the inscription is that it was written in vertical columns going from left to right, rather than in the customary way, from right to left. It is preceded by the title *Mogao ku ji* 莫高窟記 in a separate line. The main text consists of ten lines, the last one falling short of reaching the end of the line.

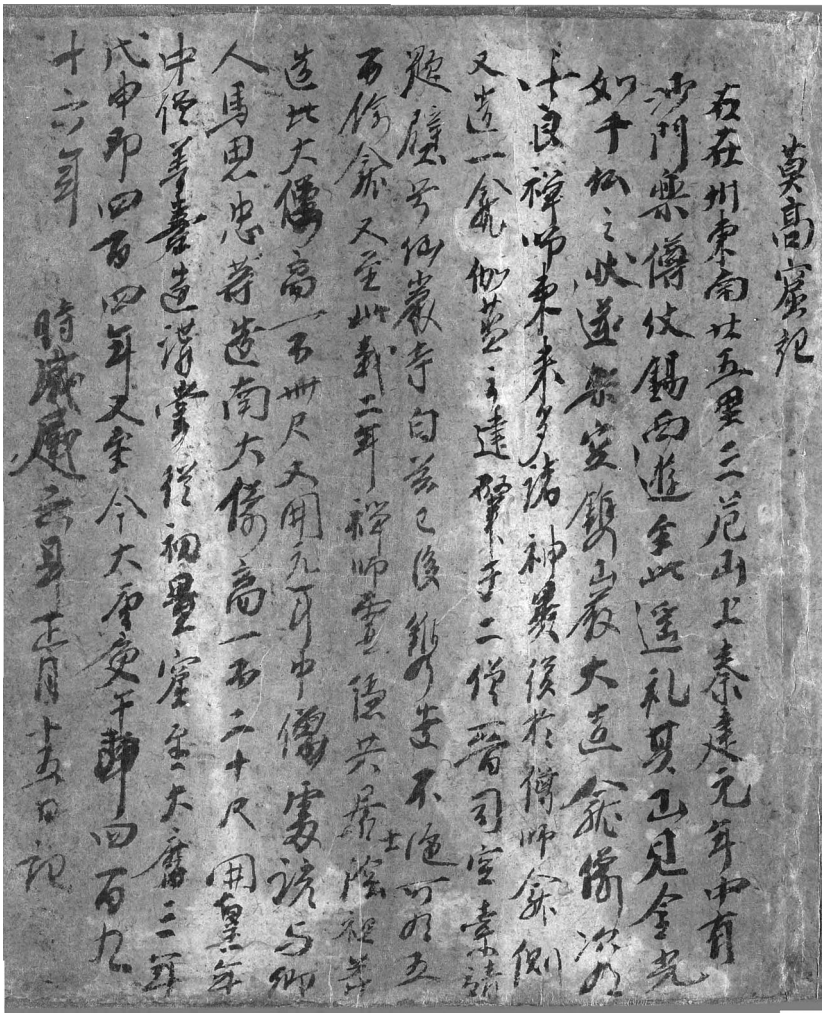

Illustration 1: Record of the Mogao Caves (*Mogao ku ji*). Copyright Bibliothèque nationale de France, Pelliot chinois 3720.

Huaishen in 865 (RONG, 1996:5–6). Chen Ming, however, argued that it was done during the ten years between 851 and 861 (CHEN, 2006:92).

The text describes how during the Jianyuan 建元 era (365–385) of the Latter Qin dynasty, the monk Lezun 樂僔 had a vision when passing through here and carved the first cave into the side of the precipice.[12] Towards the end, the text counts the number of years that have elapsed since the creation of the caves, concluding it with a dated colophon.

> 至大歷三年戊申即四百四年，又至今大唐庚午即四百九十六 [年]
> [時咸] 通六年正月十五日[13]
> Until the 3rd year of the Dali era (768), a *wushen* year, it has been 404 years; further on, until the *gengwu* year (850) of our present Great Tang dynasty, it has been 496 years.
> The time is the 15th day of the 1st month of the 6th year of the Xiantong era (865).

The copy of this text on manuscript P.3720 is almost identical to the inscription, only written in a running-hand calligraphy that happens to be far superior to that of the inscription, and in the usual direction with columns going from right to left. It is also preceded by the same title, and concluded by the same colophon. There are only six minor differences between the two versions, all listed below:

Inscription	Manuscript
建元之世	建元年中
於	于
以后	已後
與	与
一百廿尺	一百二十尺
開皇時中	開皇年中

We can see that the differences are small and have no bearing on the meaning of the text. It is also clear that the two versions are copies of the same text the primary location of which is on the wall of Cave 156. Our main interest here is to detect to what extent would information commonly used for determining the date and provenance of manuscripts be a residue of the original, or an earlier copy, from which it was copied. In this case the calligraphy and layout of the

12 Although this text does not specify the exact year, we know from other sources that Lezun arrived in Dunhuang in 366.

13 The characters enclosed in square brackets have been completely worn off but can be filled in on the basis of the manuscript copy of the text, except for the first character of the name of the Xiantong era which are also illegible on the manuscript. Fortunately, there is enough circumstantial evidence to complete the era name.

two versions are clearly different, showing that the copier was only concerned with taking down the text of the inscription and did not try to create a facsimile.

The close relationship between the two versions is also confirmed by a mistake that has been copied over without alteration. The dates referred to in this last portion of the text are incompatible because the two dates of 768 and 850 are 82 years apart, whereas 496 minus 404 comes to 92. Ideally, the two should have matched but here we have a discrepancy of ten years inexplicable on the basis of the text alone. The solution to the problem lies in the date of 850, referred to as "the *gengwu* year", which appears in this context without any explanation as to its significance. However, if we presuppose this to be the flawed value in the equation and correct it in accordance with the rest of the data, we arrive at the date of 860, a *gengchen* 庚辰 year. The reason why this date would be important is that 860 happens to be the first year of the Xiantong era, the reign period matching the date given in the colophon as to when the inscription was written. This would explain the reference to this date and also show that the word "present" (*jin* 今) refers to the reign period and not the dynasty. It is very likely, therefore, that the phrase "*gengwu* year" stands instead of "*gengchen* year", a mistake of a single character.[14] The fact that this otherwise obvious mistake appears unchanged in both versions of the text is an indication of a direct connection between them.

A vital issue related to the *Mogao ku ji* is the temporal priority of the two versions. Some researchers are of the opinion that the manuscript version is not a copy but the draft of the actual inscription, which was used to create the latter.[15] If this were true, then the manuscript would contain the autograph copy created prior to carving the inscription onto the wall of the cave. I cannot see, however, any tangible evidence in support of this theory. Apart from the fact that it would be much more likely to find one of the presumably numerous copies made subsequently from an inscription than its unique autograph version, there are several considerations arguing against such a scenario.

P.3720 recto contains a number of texts with different dates, ranging from 851 to 934. The colophon of the *Mogao ku ji*, on the other hand, claims that it was written in 865, a year that falls within the range of these dates. A closer examination of the manuscript, however, shows that it was glued together from

14 Accordingly, the words "the *gengwu* year (850) of our present Great Tang dynasty" in my above translation should be corrected and rephrased as "the *gengchen* year (860) of our current [reign period (i.e. Xiangtong)] of the Great Tang dynasty".

15 CHEN (2006:94), for example, refers to the manuscript copy as the *digao* 底稿 of the inscription.

smaller panels that are different in terms of the quality of paper and the handwriting on them.[16] Some of the individual components used for P.3720 are so small (e.g. 8 cm in width) that it is clear that they were not only dismantled from other scrolls as complete panels, but at times were also cut off from existing manuscripts in order to separate them from their original environment. This observation is further supported by the fact that in some cases bits of the cut off characters are still missing at the edges of the paper, showing that in its original context the text did not stop here.

The part of the scroll that has the *Mogao ku ji* on the verso, contains the text *Di yi jian gaoshen* 第一件告身 (The First Appointment Decree), and is dated to the 5th year of the Dazhong 大中 reign (851). In terms of the handwriting and the color of the paper, this panel is very similar to the two following ones, while being distinctly different from the ones that come after. Thus we can suppose that these three were written by the same person, or at least the same group of people, at approximately the same time. The second panel begins with the second appointment decree dated to the 10th year of the Dazhong reign (856), whereas the third panel records the third decree dated to the 3rd year of the Xiantong reign (862). The next panel, almost as long as the first three together, is of different color of paper and has two texts in handwritings that differ from each other and the first three panels. The date of the first of the two texts is the 10th year of the Xiantong reign (869), while the second text is curiously a copy of the text from the first panel with the same date of 856.

Now it is clear that the first three panels written by the same hand on the same kind of paper form a unit both physically and thematically. The text *Mogao ku ji* is written on the back of the first panel in a way that implies that this was done before the panels were glued together. The reason for this is that it starts at the beginning of the first panel but only when we count them from the recto. On the verso, the *Mogao ku ji* actually starts at the beginning of the last panel, leaving two panels worth of empty space to its right. Had the text been applied after the three panels were stitched, it would have started at the beginning of the rightmost panel, that is, panel three counted from the recto side.

The above line of argumentation tells us that the first text on these three panels, and consequently on the entire scroll, was the *Mogao ku ji*, and that this initial manuscript was used to create the first unit of the three panels with the

16 I am grateful to Dr Thierry Delcourt and Dr Nathalie Monnet of the Manuscript Department at the Bibliothèque nationale de France for giving me the opportunity to examine the manuscript in person.

three promotion decrees on them.[17] However, the date on the *Mogao ku ji* is 865, whereas that of the first decree is 856, even though their actual sequence of being copied onto the same sheet of paper is just the opposite. In addition, since the color of paper and the handwriting make it probable that the three promotion decrees on the recto were written about the same time, the thirteen year range as indicated by their colophons (856, 862 and 869) show that the dates cannot refer to the time when the texts were authored. Neither can they be draft versions of the actual decrees. Instead, the logical conclusion that results from the above observations is that the texts were copied out and gathered together as a single collection sometime after the last date.[18] Although not part of the promotion decree sequence, the *Mogao ku ji* on the verso is also closely tied with these manuscripts on the account of its paper. Because the paper appears to be identical on the first three panels, we would have to assume that this text was written along with the three decrees, otherwise the person gluing together the panels would not have been able to find exactly the same kind of paper. Therefore, all the texts on these three panels had to have been copied at approximately the same time. Moreover, this time could not have been earlier than 869, the latest date in the texts, and this precludes the possibility of the *Mogao ku ji* having served as the draft for an inscription dated 865.

An additional argument in favor of this supposition is the comparison of differences between the two versions. On the manuscript there are three cases referring to the reign periods without specifying the actual date, and in two of these cases the wording of the inscription is different:

Inscription	Manuscript
建元之世	建元年中
開元年中	開元年中
開皇時中	開皇年中

We can see that the manuscript in each case uses the phrase *nian zhong* 年中, whereas on the inscription there are three different forms: *zhi shi* 之世, *nian zhong* 年中, and *shi zhong* 時中. Following the textual criticism principle of *lectio difficilior potior* we are bound to select the multiple versions seen on the inscription as the earlier ones. Linguistically speaking, the phrase *nian zhong* is

17 Naturally, this also means that what we call recto today was originally the blank verso.

18 At this point I am still only dealing with the first three panels in this scroll, although a similar line of reasoning could probably be applied to the texts on the remaining panels.

certainly the most commonly used expression of these three, and it is more probable that a scribe would make an unconscious correction in this direction than the other way around. We should also note that a slip of the brush is by far less likely to occur during the slow process of carving a copy onto the rock, rather than jotting down a text in a running-hand script.

Furthermore, subliminal changes during the act of writing are more likely to occur when a similar but slightly different phrase is present within the periphery of the scribe's vision. In our case, however, the first "correction" occurs within the very first line before the scribe had reached the place where the phrase *nian zhong* appears on the inscription. While I am aware of the risk of pushing this line of reasoning too far, this circumstance suggests not only that the manuscript was copied from the inscription but also that the same scribe made more than one copy, most likely within a short period of time.[19]

3. The Gantong si Manuscript

This is a commemoration of rebuilding the Gantong monastery in Liangzhou, the only known copy of which is found on manuscript IOL Tib J 754(c) held at the British Library in London. Initially, when Aurel Stein acquired the manuscript in Dunhuang, it was glued onto a scroll which was subsequently separated into three different manuscripts by the conservators of the India Office Library.[20] The longest of these, catalogued as IOL Tib J 754(a) was a copy of *juan* 3 of the *Baoenjing* 報恩經 sutra in Chinese on one side and several Tibetan tantric texts on the other. Onto this long sheet of paper was glued a slightly shorter one which contained a series of Tibetan letters with some Chinese notes in between.[21] The two manuscripts were attached to each other in a way that the

19 As an analogous case, based on the comparison of the Dali inscription with the corresponding text on manuscript P.3608, GONG (2004:51–52) concludes that the manuscript could not have been the draft version for the inscription, but a posterior copy of it.

20 The shelfmark, IOL Tib J 754(c), carries a significant amount of information about the history and current location of the manuscript. "IOL" means that it was housed at the India Office Library, "Tib" that it became part of the Tibetan collection; and "J" that it was a manuscript from Dunhuang. The number 754 was assigned to it by Louis de La Vallée-Poussin who catalogued the collection during the First World War (VALLÉE-POUSSIN, 1962).

21 In turn, each sheet of paper consisted of several panels glued together in succession. The IOL conservators also separated the panels and today these are stored individually, each in its own Melinex cover.

Tibetan tantric texts from manuscript (a) were glued onto the empty verso side of (b), the new object having the Chinese *Baoenjing* sutra on one side and the Tibetan letters of passage on the other. Because (a) was slightly longer than (b), the remaining section of (a) was covered with a small manuscript that recorded a commemoration of the Gantong monastery in Liangzhou.[22] This smallest piece was catalogued under the letter (c).

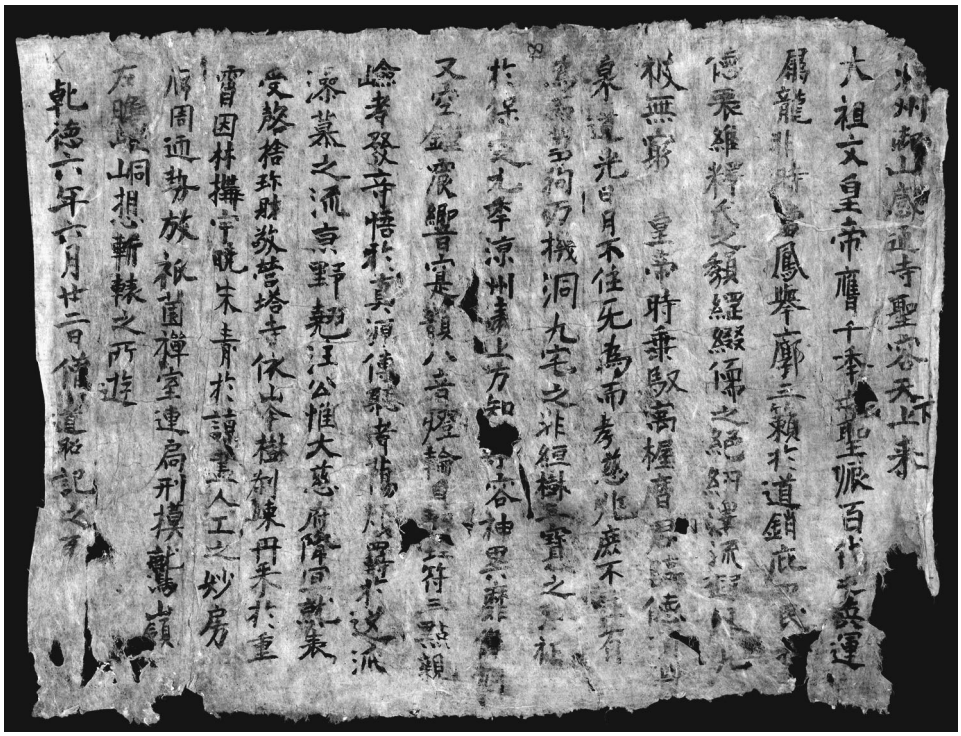

Illustration 2: The Gantong si manuscript. Copyright The British Library, IOL Tib J 754(c).

The main text on manuscript (c) consists of 14 lines, not counting the title and the colophon, each of which occupy a separate line. The title says, “The Holy Countenance that descended from Heaven above at the Gantong monastery on Mount Yu, Liangzhou” (涼州御山感通寺聖容天上下來), in reference to the

22 All three manuscripts were written on different paper and it is clear that, despite ending up as components of a single object, they were originally discrete items. Of the three parts, the paper of manuscript (a) with the *Baoenjing* is of the best quality, while that of the other two manuscripts are inferior.

legend of Liu Sahe 劉薩訶 of the 5th century who prophesized that an image of Buddha would appear at this place and that its completeness or incompleteness would signify whether the world was in peace or turmoil. The colophon at the end of the text says: "Recorded by the monk Daozhao on the 22nd day of the 6th month of the 6th year of the Qiande era (968)" (乾德六年六月廿二日僧道昭記之耳). This date, however, is in direct conflict with the title because we know from the combination of historical sources and archaeological material that by this time the monastery was known under a different name.

The monastery was initially built in the 1st year of Baoding 保定 (561) under the name of Ruixiang si 瑞像寺 (Monastery of the Auspicious Image), and was renamed to Gantong si 感通寺 (Monastery of the Spiritual Response) in the 5th year of Daye 大業 (609) when Emperor Yang 煬帝 travelled through here and decreed the name change.[23] A century and half later, sometime during the mid 8th century, the monastery's name was changed again, this time to Shengrong si 聖容寺 (Monastery of the Holy Countenance).[24] It is apparent that by the time Daozhao appended his colophon to the end of the text, the monastery had been known by the name of Shengrong si for over a century. Considering that the handwriting on the manuscript is the same for the main text and the colophon, the only logical solution to the contradiction is that he copied an older text that had been written between 609 and the mid 8th century, during the time the monastery was known under the name of Gantong si.

Corroborating evidence comes from over a thousand miles further to the West, from a stele found by a peasant in 1911 near Turfan. The inscription commemorates the building of a monastery at Gaochang by Qu Bin (高昌綰曹朗中麴斌造寺銘) and the colophon at the end dates the erection of the stele to the 15th year of the Yanchang 延昌 (575) reign period.[25] There is a section in this otherwise rather long inscription that echoes the last part of Daozhao's record:

> Gantong si manuscript, copied by Daozhao
> 罄捨珍財, 敬營塔寺. 依峰樹刹, 竦(聳)丹采(彩)於重霄; 因林構宇, 曉朱青於[□□], 諒盡人工之妙. 房廊周迴(匝), 勢放(倣)祇薗, 禪室連扃, 刑模鷲嶺.

23 *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T.2122).

24 The evidence for this name change is found on three bits of inscription on the wall of a pagoda located behind the actual site of the monastery, which say "Shengrong si" 聖容寺, "the 2nd year of Qianyuan" 乾元二年 (759), and "1500 Tibetan monks" (番僧一千五百人), respectively (ZHU, 2005:64).

25 A full transcription of this long inscription was published, among other places, in HUANG, 1989:196, and IKEDA, 1985:112–113.

Using up precious wealth, he respectfully renovated the stupa and the monastery. On the mountain top, he erected a temple with red colours rising towards the skies; in the forest he constructed buildings with vermillion and turquoise reaching the […]. All this seems to have [been done in a way that] exhausted the brilliance of human craftsmanship. The cloister around the central hall was made circular, in a layout emulating the Garden of Jetavana; the meditation rooms were linked together in a chain, in a shape modelling the Vulture Peak.

Qu Bin's stele
[…] 磬(罄)捨珍財, 建茲靈刹. 因其(峰)定 □, □□ […] 構宇. 銀槃切漢, □□□□ □ 踊, 金鐘振響, 似香山之美樂. 房廊周迤, 勢方(倣)祇恒(薗), 禪室連扃, 祕如兜率. […] Using up precious wealth, he built this marvellous temple. On the mountain top,[26] he established a [temple, in the forest], and he constructed buildings. With the moon high above, ascending […]. The sound of golden bells echoed around, modelling the beautiful music of Xiangshan. The cloister around the central hall was made circular, in a layout emulating the Garden of Jetavana; the meditation rooms were linked together in a chain, with a density resembling the Tushita heaven.

It is evident that these two sections are close not only in their actual terminology but also in the general sequence of images depicting the reconstruction of the monastery. While they form parts of distinct texts that have no direct connection, it is evident that the similarity of wording and imagery between the two versions is more than a mere coincidence. The significance of their similarity in our case is that it reveals that the source of the Gantong si manuscript is undoubtedly an inscription commemorating the rebuilding of the Gantong monastery. Although the inscription itself was carved while the monastery was still called Gantong si (i.e. between 609 and the mid 8th century), the copy dates to 968. Accordingly, the date in the colophon was not copied from the original but was added by the copier in reference to his own act of copying.[27]

26 Ikeda's transcription has the character 其 in the phrase 因其定□, but Huang Wenbi's 黃文弼 earlier rendering has 形 (HUANG, 1989:196). Based on the Gantong si manuscript, we can be relatively certain that neither 其 nor 形 is appropriate here. Instead, the context calls for a noun describing the natural surrounding of the place where the temple was erected, along the lines of the phrases 依峰樹刹 ("on the mountain top, he erected a temple") and 因林構宇 ("in the forest he constructed buildings"). Based on these parallels, I translate the phrase as if the character 峰 ("mountain top") was used in this place.

27 This is also evidenced by the use of the verb *ji* 記 "to record" at the end of the colophon which in such places often refers to the colophon itself, rather than the main text. While this is certainly not a universal rule and there are numerous cases, including the *Mogao ku ji* examined earlier in this paper, when the recording is meant in reference to the main text, there is at the same time a clear distinction when this word is used in combination with other verbs. For example, when we see the phrase *xie ji* 寫記 in a colophon of a Buddhist sutra,

And here we arrive at the question of provenance. Even though we have confirmed that the manuscript was a copy of a stele inscription and thus would be justified to assign its place of origin to the location of the stele at the Gantong monastery in Liangzhou, Stein acquired it at Dunhuang, presumably along with the thousands of other manuscripts found in the newly discovered cave library. Daozhao, the monk who signed the manuscript, could have copied it either from the original stele at the Gantong monastery in Liangzhou, or from another copy. In the latter case, he could have made his copy far away from where the stele actually stood, theoretically anywhere in Western China, including Dunhuang.[28] While the manuscript itself provides no more clues regarding its place of origin, additional information can be arrived at on the basis of the Tibetan letters of passage, i.e. manuscript (b), that used to form a single scroll with the Gantong si manuscript before the individual pieces were separated by modern conservators.

Between the Tibetan letters there are Chinese characters that appear to be scribbles but can be deciphered as Tibetan names and titles transcribed phonetically into Chinese.[29] There is also a Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* written phonetically with Chinese characters. These bits and pieces of Chinese text reveal that they were written by the same hand as the Gantong si manuscript, that is, by the monk Daozhao. The significance of this discovery lies in the fact that we can associate Daozhao with the Tibetan letters of passage, which were written as letters of introduction to the abbots of monasteries along the pilgrimage route. From the Tibetan letters we learn that our pilgrim was coming from Wutaishan and ultimately intended to travel to India.[30] Beside these two terminal poles, how-

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the first word refers to copying the sutra, whereas the second to recording this fact. Thus while one would be tempted to take the phrase *xie ji* as a compound word simply meaning "to write", the numerous examples of such combination in Dunhuang manuscripts show that the character 記 in fact refers to the colophon. For example, one of the texts on manuscript Or.8210/S.4479 has the colophon 乾符六年己亥五月庚寅廿日酉寫記 correctly translated by Giles as follows: "Copying recorded on the *yu* day, the 20th of the 5th moon, *keng-yin*, of the 6th year, *chi-hai*, of Ch'ien-fu [13th June, 879]." (GILES, 1939:1035). In contrast with this, the Dali inscription, for example, uses the verb *jian* 建 "to erect" eliminating any doubt that the colophon was part of the inscription.

28 We can reliably affirm that the manuscript was produced in Western China on the basis of paper quality and the use of a Tibetan-style hard pen which became widespread in the region starting from the second half of the 8th century.

29 Enoki who catalogued the Chinese manuscripts in the Tibetan collection of the India Office Library believed them to be meaningless scribbles, with the exception of a *dhāraṇī* written in Chinese (VALLÉE-POUSSIN, 1962:259).

30 On the details of the Tibetan letters of passage, see VAN SCHAIK / GALAMBOS, forthcoming.

ever, we only have details of his travels along the Hexi corridor, going along the route of Hezhou 河州, Tsongka 宗哥, Liangzhou, Ganzhou 甘州, and Shazhou 沙洲 (i.e. Dunhuang). Accordingly, the letters not only tell us that Daozhao had in fact passed through Liangzhou with these manuscripts in hand, but also provide an explanation as to how the manuscript may have ended up in Dunhuang.

The above pieces of evidence offer the following scenario. Daozhao was passing through Liangzhou in 968 on his way westward and at the Shengrong monastery (formerly known as Gantong si) made a copy of a stele commemorating the rebuilding of the monastery. He then attached his copy to his letters of passage and continued on his way to Dunhuang and then farther towards India. This is how far we can reconstruct his story. The fact that the manuscripts ended up in Dunhuang could be due to him either dying in Dunhuang or continuing his journey with a new set of manuscripts. But we can now with high probability assign the provenance of the Gantong si manuscript to Liangzhou.

4. Conclusions

The two primary coordinates of an archaeological object are its date and provenance. These are the values that determine its position in historical time and space, establish its "when" and "where". Although many of the Dunhuang manuscripts come from the immediate vicinity of the caves, a significant number of them originated from elsewhere. For a reliable analysis of the corpus and its local peculiarities, it is important to determine which manuscripts were produced locally and which ones imported.

The study of the copies of epigraphic material is justified by the immediate historical value of inscriptions. As a general principle, they commemorate events that were significant from the point of view of the local community. In fact, most of what we know today about the local history of Dunhuang comes from a handful of steles and/or their manuscript copies. Although Chinese researchers have already done extensive work on all manuscript copies of stone inscriptions, they mostly concentrated on their content, trying to compare originals and copies to collate a philologically reliable text, rather than assessing the discrepancies between them.

The *Mogao ku ji* and the Gantong si manuscript are but two examples of the handwritten copies made from inscriptions. Today, we try to use palaeographical and codicological information, including character structure and page

layout, to determine the date or provenance of manuscripts, often without paying enough attention to the fact that almost all of these features could have been transmitted from earlier copies together with the text. The *Mogao ku ji* is an example in which the colophon was copied together with the date, without any reference to the time when the act of copying was performed. The Gantong si manuscript, on the other hand, showed that such a colophon could have also been added by the person making the copy. There is no automatic way of telling which case one is faced with, the researcher must make a decision on a case-by-case basis. In this paper I tried to show that a close analysis of the manuscript allows us to make such decisions with a considerable degree of certainty.

The two manuscripts analyzed here also tell us that, when trying to determine a text's date or provenance, it is important to keep in mind that manuscripts often represent composite objects the components of which might have a history of their own. Although we normally encounter complete manuscripts from Dunhuang in the form of scrolls, a closer look may reveal that the individual panels were sometimes used as building blocks to assemble larger units, the elements of which differ in most attributes. It is through analyzing the interrelation of the texts and panels that we begin to uncover the complex process of the manuscript's creation and the different layers of time and locations.

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